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1 February 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

FROM:

[REDACTED]
National Intelligence Officer for China

SUBJECT: DCI's Briefing of PRC Foreign Minister

TIME AND PLACE: Mr. Oksenberg's Office in the Executive
Office Building, 31 January, 0940 hours

1. Present at the briefing on the Chinese side were PRC Foreign Minister Huang Hua, Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wenjin, Interpreter Zhi Chaozhu, and Lian Zhengbao as note taker. On the U.S. side were the DCI, Dr. Brzezinski (who left the briefing before it was finished), Mr. Oksenberg, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The briefing proceeded very much along the lines discussed with the Director in the DCI Conference Room on the evening of 30 January. In addition to the notes taken by Lian Zhengbao, Zhang Wenjin also took detailed notes.

2. Huang Hua asked for elaboration of some points during the briefing. One question he raised was on the possible use by the Soviets of Cam Ranh Bay. According to their information, some two months ago the Vietnamese had ordered the local inhabitants of Cam Ranh Bay to evacuate. The Director said that we had also heard this information, which might possibly be true; however, we had nothing to confirm the report. Huang also asked the Director for the number of Soviet divisions facing Iran. The DCI replied that there were 12 Soviet divisions, but that we believed their primary mission was to defend against a possible attack by NATO forces through Turkey.

3. At the completion of his briefing the Director asked if Huang had any comments on the accuracy of his figures, noting that we did not have all the information but

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had presented the best we had. Zhang Wenjin then requested further comments on the Soviet navy. The Director reviewed the development of the Soviet naval forces: an initial emphasis on submarines and missiles for defensive purposes, and now a force becoming capable of reaching out a considerable distance from the Soviet shores. In the Far East, the Soviets seek to control the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan and to deny access to these regions by U.S. naval forces, and are sustaining a presence in the Indian Ocean. They are also attempting to develop an amphibious capability, but lack sufficient amphibious ships, manpower, and supporting air power to sustain a landing in force. (The Director had already reviewed some aspects of the growth of Soviet naval sea power during his briefing, including a reference to the possible stationing of a Kiev-type aircraft carrier in the Far East.)

4. Huang Hua then returned to the subject of Cam Ranh Bay, observing that the Soviets were likely to make use at any time of naval and air bases already in existence in Vietnam, e.g., Cam Ranh Bay or Danang, partly to control the South China Sea and the western Pacific, and partly to offset the U.S. bases at Clark Field and Subic Bay. He pointed out that in this way they would be able to advance forward 4400 kilometers from their original base at Vladivostok. Huang asked for the Director's views.

5. The Director agreed with Huang Hua's assessment, but added that he believed that it would take some time for the Soviets to develop a naval base at Cam Ranh Bay. The Director showed Huang Hua two overhead photographs of the area which indicated a low level of activity. He pointed out that the Vietnamese had also dismantled many structures built by the U.S., presumably for use as construction materials in the new agricultural centers they are developing. He recalled that even when we were using Cam Ranh Bay we had worked out of Subic, and therefore the facilities there were not too extensive. He observed that the Chinese perhaps knew the Vietnamese far better than we did, and wondered if the latter were willing to have the Soviets establish bases in their country. Huang said that from the way it looked now the Vietnamese were tending to rely more and more on the Soviets. Mr. Holdridge mentioned that there were no oil tanks or other oil storage facilities at Cam Ranh Bay and that this hindered its development as an operating naval base.

6. The Director surmised that from the Soviet standpoint a great deal depended on the Vietnamese being able to finish what they had begun in Cambodia. Huang said in response that a more important problem was the overall strategic plans of the Soviets in that area. Right now, he added, what they were doing was linking up their strategic positions in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. The Director said that they had certainly moved in this direction. They had replaced their loss of Somalia with a foothold in South Yemen, and might be looking for another foothold in Asia closer to Vladivostok.

7. Comment: The Chinese appeared to be extremely interested in the briefing, Zhang Wenjin in particular. Huang Hua kept a poker face, but as noted did ask questions. Our records show that this was the first review of the Soviet military posture in such detail since the fall of 1974.

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